

Master's Orders and Pilot's Advice - by Bob MacDonald

A couple of weeks ago I had finished watching the evening news and decided to surf through the television channels. I came across a program that was talking about some of the large container and cargo ships that go through the waters around British Columbia. As I watched the program on how they navigate I realized an important spiritual leadership lesson was being illustrated through this documentary.

The program highlighted that the shipping ports along the British Columbia coast have ships coming from many countries around the world. Each of the docking ports have unique characteristics and unusual navigation challenges. To ensure safe passage as a ship approaches these points of entry, a "pilot" who is familiar with the local water currents, wind patterns, and the underwater land formations is brought on board so that shipping disasters are averted. The captain of the ship is still in charge. The pilot, with his local experience and local knowledge, gives advice to the captain as to how he should navigate. The master (captain) and the pilot work together as a team to bring the ship to the destination. The master gives the orders on the advice of the pilot.

The application to us as church leaders is that Jesus Christ is the Captain and Master of our churches and ministries. Yet Jesus has invited us to be in partnership with Him to give leadership. Jesus has not asked us merely to be like robots, looking for specific directions for every single circumstance. I have asked the Lord on several occasions, "What way should we go?" and I heard Him say, "There is no right or wrong in this case, but what ever you can make work."

Jesus has invited us to use our local knowledge and experiences along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring direction. Just as the ship pilot that has been invited onto the ship does not have complete charge of the ship, neither do we have complete charge of the church. It is not our ship! Jesus is the Captain and we want to be reflecting His desires. However, as we give leadership, the Holy Spirit will use our spiritual gifts, heart passion, abilities, personality and education to create a unique expression of the church for the environment and context in which we are called to minister. It is through this partnership that Jesus will direct us to lead the church into the unique mandate that He has given for us in the region we are located.

There are certain basic purposes for the church that we should all be working on to develop more fully. (See Rick Warren's book, "The Purpose Driven Church" for an explanation of the five purposes of the church.) I believe that Christ also gives each ministry and church a mandate (calling, assignment) to emphasize certain expressions of Jesus that no one else around will fill. From this unique mandate, we understand how we fit into the larger picture with other ministries to form the complete expression of Jesus. We realize we are not in competition with other ministries. We recognize that they are also moving in the unique mandate that Christ has given them. Together we express more fully the Body of Christ. I think this is why we see such a wonderful variety within the body of Christ.

Let's not try to copy someone else or their ministry. In doing that we would be denying the way

our Creator created us and desires to use us when He called us. Let's use all the gifts, passion, abilities, personality and education that Christ has guided us through in our life to work alongside the Master, in partnership with Him. Together we will guide the ship (church) into the destination that He desires. Seek the Lord for the unique mandate He has for you, the church and the ministry.

Work with the Master/Captain (Jesus Christ) for the blend of your "advice" and His orders.

The television documentary also refer to one shipping port where they use a unique system to ensure the ship is your mind

Rick Warren has come up with the acronym SHAPE - spiritual experiences, heart passion, abilities, personality, education - to help identify a persons mission in life.

the unique expression of his desires will flow through our personalities and the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us.